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The Cosmic Dance of Lord Shiva: Divulgence of Vedic Cosmogony and Culture in *Shiva Tandava Stotram*

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Abstract

This article intends to explore and interpret the Vedic concept of creationism in the Tandava of Lord Shiva and *Shiva Tandava Stotram* with Ananda Coomaraswamy's philosophy of cosmic dance. *Shiva Tandava Stotram* is a collection of fourteen Sanskrit hymns that rejuvenate and systematize all the dynamics of Lord Shiva's cosmic dance in a rhythmic way. This article further examines the multifaceted dimensions of Lord Shiva's cosmic dance with Hindu cosmology and modern viewpoints of physics. The Tandava is the frantic, but divine dance of Lord Shiva with ecstasy and bliss. All dualities and antagonism merge and become one in the perfect combination of frantic body movement and ecstatic rhythm of the mantras. In this regard of frantic as wild but natural and rhythmic as the beauty of creation, this is the cosmic dance to create, evolve, sustain, veil, and unveil the creation. Lord Shiva is Nataraja, the cosmic dancer who is both the destroyer and creator. He destroys to create. His cosmic dance is the dance of entire creations and universe, and the dance of atoms as per modern physics. It is the symbolic pattern of cosmology postulated in the Vedic philosophy with manifold transcendence of time and space and it has become the metaphor of creation in the modern world. Even in the secular context, the image of the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva gnashes the metaphorical value. For instance, the sculptor of Nataraja Shiva stands outside the European Organization of Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland. *Shiva Tandava Stotram* exhibits all of these exposures of cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. This article implements the paradigm of qualitative research and textual analysis method using the theoretical tool developed by Coomaraswamy and supported by modern physics in order to explore and interpret these multifaceted aspects in *Shiva Tandava Stotram*. In this sense, this paper becomes a threshold to enter the cultural and cosmological dimensions of the Tandava of Lord Shiva that prevail in the domain of Indian Philosophy.

Keywords: Consciousness, cosmic dance, creation, Nataraja, Purusha, *Tandava*

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Introduction

Shiva Tandava Stotram (hymn) unravels the mystery of cosmic creation. The hymns unveil how the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva create and evolve, sustain and preserve, veil and unveil the cosmic cycles of creation. The cosmic dance flashes the dynamism of creation because this manifestation of the creation is nothing more than the dance where the multiple cycles of energy go on folding and unfolding. This article interprets and explores the powerful dynamics of *Tandava Stotram* with the perspective of the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva theorized by philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy. The cosmic dance of Lord Shiva reflects the concepts of creationism and cosmology of the Vedic philosophy and the Hindu religious system. Likewise, it also views its significance and meaning in the secular context while analyzing it from the point of view of modern physics.

Shiva Tandava Stotram (hymn) is supposedly composed by Ravana, the King of Lanka and the great devotee of Lord Shiva, to praise the power and eternity of Lord Shiva. It is a collection of fourteen enchanting and rhythmic hymns—except the concluding ones—that glorify Lord Shiva, one among the major three gods of the Hindu religious system. Each of the hymns is composed in powerful Sanskrit that integrates music, figures of speech, and the poetic qualities. The combination is unsurpassable. These hymns describe the *Tandava* dance of Lord Shiva. *Tandava* is the frantic, powerful dance of Lord Shiva to create, sustain and destroy to recreate again. It is an endless cycle. It has a great description. Fritjof Capra describes, “the dance of Shiva is the dancing of universe; the ceaseless flow of energy going through an infinite variety of patterns that melt into one another” (271). In *Tandava*, Shiva destroys to create. In him, everything melts and become one. Every duality vanishes. Then again a question arises what is *Tandava*? Stella Kramrisch describes it in a very sequential way:

At the end of time, he dances the awesome Tandava. The stamping of his foot, the gyrations of his body, his flailing arms toss the mountains into the air; the ocean rises, the stars are lashed and scattered by Siva's matted hair. In order to save the world, Siva in his perverse power dances the world out of existence, wildly laughing, scattering ashes from his body so that the world may be renewed. This is the Tandava dance of Siva, as Kala-Maha-kala, the Destroyer, Destroyer of destruction. But, from his flowing hair the rivers will flow again into existence and the rays of sun and moon will be seen again for what they are. (439)

This dancing Shiva is called the Nataraja—the cosmic dancer. He dances to redirect the time and flow of cosmic creation. He gives the manifestation to the unmanifested reality. He is the cosmic consciousness from whom everything engraves. The word “Shiva” is a Sanskrit word that means gracious, benevolent, and auspicious. He is gracious because he creates, preserves, and destroys anything evil. He is the destroyer of illusion, destruction, decay, and even death.

Review of Literature

Lord Shiva's *Tandava* has attracted many scholars from different arenas. It has become a great symbol for scientists and literary figures throughout the world. It is not an ordinary dance, but the whirling power of cosmic power, which in its frenzy gives rise to a cycle of creation, destruction and creation again. Philip Goldberg relates the dance of Shiva not only to the Indian Vedic tradition, but also to the cosmic creation. He views that in totality the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva “depicts cosmic creation and destruction, in which infinite dynamism coexists with eternal, changeless being” (283). The dancing is thus a cycle of an eternal process. Wolf-Dieter Storl in his book *Shiva, the Wild God of*

Power and Ecstasy highlights this connection logically. He says, “What is dance, but the continual loss and instantaneous regaining of balance? Shiva’s dance is the fine edge of the universe tumbling into chaos and destruction and the simultaneous recreation of poise, in a continuous, ecstatic, spontaneous whirl of creation—destruction creation—destruction” (ch. “Shiva’s Dance” par. 2). This becomes a point of clarification that the *Tandava* of Lord Shiva demands a systematic exploration with new insights related to cosmic creation along with its symbolic interpretation.

The poise and gesture of Lord Shiva in the dance also bear a great symbolic and metaphoric value. Kramrisch highlights Nataraja is the king of the dancers. In this dance, both the creation folds and unfolds. She writes:

Nataraja dances the cosmos into existence, upholds its existence, and dances it out of existence. The Lord veils existence with illusion so that it is seen as real, and, dancing, he removes the veil. The raised leg of the dancer shows the liberating freedom of his dance, the drum raised by the right hand sounds the note of creation, the flame in the left hand flickers in the change brought about by destruction, the right hand grants freedom from fear, the fear of repeated births and deaths, and assures the maintenance of life. (440)

When the Lord dances, the creation dances with him. Besides, why does the dance have such a great value in the Hindu culture? It is because that the primal beat of creation was the dance where all the dynamics of life force and creation and destruction amalgamate for the formation of moving patterns of the universe.

The cosmogony theory of modern physics also speculates that the creation is the dances of atoms. Capra notes that modern physicists may regard the dance of Shiva as the dance of matter in the subatomic level (272). The creation must have gone through multiple cycles of creation and destruction. This cyclic view of creation is the underlying pattern of Shiva’s *Tandava*. Storl too supports that the dance of Shiva has become metaphor for the dance of particles at the subatomic level where the energy transforms from one stage to another (ch. “Shiva’s Dance” par. 1). The link of dancing Shiva with creation, in this way, bears value. Vanamali in his book *Shiva, Stories and Teachings from the Shiva Mahapurana* conjoins the relation of Nataraja Shiva to the dance of energy. He views the description of modern physics about “matter is not as passive and inert, but as continuously dancing and vibrating. Physicists speak of the continuous dance of subatomic particles and use the words “dance of creation “and “energy dance.” When we look at a sculpture of the dancing Shiva, the Nataraja, this description of the physicists comes forcibly to mind. The Nataraja is the personification of this cosmic dance” (ch. “The Great Universal God” par. 12). In this way, the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva is related to the speculations of modern physics. In the underlying pattern, the quest of modern physics resembles the cosmic dance of Nataraja Shiva.

The image of Shiva has been globalized. Philippe L. De Coster believes that it has also been brought into secular contexts. Nowadays, “People worldwide are seeing Nataraja through a multitude of lenses—commercial, personal, scientific, and artistic—and finding deep but differing meanings. One striking example has its roots in twentieth-century physics” (25). In the larger context, the cosmic dance of Shiva has become metaphorical in this modern-day world.

The cosmic dance of Shiva transcends time and space. It has become a matter of exploration from diverse standpoints. The previous study has only talked about the *Tandava* of Lord Shiva. This article explores all dimensions of Lord Shiva’s cosmic dance in *Shiva Tandava Stotram*. In this aspect, it provides an additional perspective to the hymns. Thus, this article intends to explore and interpret *Shiva Tandava Stotram* with new perspectives to reveal its symbolic and metaphoric value for the modern world.

The cosmic dance of Lord Shiva symbolizes the creation, destruction, sustenance, and other multiple aspects of the Hindu culture. All the antagonism and polarization of this phenomenal world merge in the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. Likewise, it has become a metaphor for the modern scientific world. These concepts invite systematic exploration and interpretation. *Shiva Tandava Stotram* reveals all the patterns of cosmic dance in its sonorous and musical hymns. This article solves these queries by answering these research questions: a) What is the significance of cosmic dance of Lord Shiva? Why do hymns in *Shiva Tandava Stotram* symbolize the cosmic creation? How does *Shiva Tandava Stotram* reveal the dynamics of Vedic cosmogony and culture?

Therefore, the purpose of this article is to examine the multifaceted aspects of cosmic dance of Lord Shiva in *Shiva Tandava Stotram*.

Methodology

The article applies the approach of qualitative research to answer the research questions. John Creswell views that this approach always provides new interpretations to the concepts (4). It vividly colours the concepts with new perspectives. That's why, the paradigm of qualitative approach, according to Ranjit Kumar, utilizes an open and very flexible enquiry. It aims to explore and interpret diverse concepts (379). This research, being fundamentally a qualitative research, does not simply generalize the ideas to crystalize the diverse pattern and meaning of *Shiva Tandava Stotram*. The article interprets only eight hymns, out of fourteen, as the source of primary concepts. It implies the textual analysis method. Wayne C. Booth et al. opines that quotations, textual evidence, and historical facts become data and concepts in the research of humanities (30). To justify the claim, ideas and commentaries from various critics have been considered. Cross- references have also been duly acknowledged to establish the arguments.

Cosmic Dance of Lord Shiva

Lord Shiva is known as Nataraja, the cosmic dancer. The whole universe is his theater and he alone is the dancer and the spectators. In his dance, all the cosmic creative forces unify and dance with him. He is the ONE in whom the entire cosmic aspects dwell. Ananda Coomaraswamy in his book *The Dance of Shiva* interprets, "The cosmos is His theatre, there are many different steps in His repertory, He Himself is actor and audience" (66). In this regard, the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva resembles the philosophical, mythical, religious, and aesthetic dimensions of Indian philosophy and culture. The dance has such a cosmic significance that epitomizes the whole creation, its sustenance, destruction, and rejuvenation. Coomaraswamy views the dance as the "manifestation of primal rhythmic energy" (66). It also stands for the usual beats of life and death. It is a totality of the entire multifaceted cosmic forces of the universe. In Shiva's dance, creation, destruction, and maintenance merge and find their vibes. Coomaraswamy gives a splendour explanation:

The dance, in fact, represents His five activities (*Pancakritya*), viz: *Shrishti* (overlooking, creation, evolution), *sthiti* (preservation, support), *Samhara* (destruction, evolution), *Tirobhava* (veiling, embodiment, illusion, and also, giving rest), *Anugraha* (release, salvation, grace). These, separately considered, are the activities of the deities Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Maheshvara and Sadashiva. (79)

The powerful five syllabic *mantra-na-ma-shi-va-ya-* invokes Shiva and stands for the five-fold cosmic aspects of the universe and God. Shiva destroys to give ways to new

ones. His dance provides the graphicacy to realize the unmanifested reality in manifested forms.

What Shiva destroys is the illusion and darkness that lurks not only in the divine creative activities, but also in the human soul. He is the fire of everything. The fire that he radiates to the creation becomes the driving force for the creation. The fire in Shiva's dance has great symbolic value. Mahalaxmi clarifies that fire as a symbol provides the visual connection between the sky and the earth and manifested as well as unmanifested reality. This joins the dance of Shiva with the burning grounds ("Introduction" par. 2). He is the truth of the universe. Shiva is the source of cosmic consciousness, and the cosmic dance is "a state of consciousness beyond time when SAT, CIT, and ANANDA, Being, and Consciousness and Joy are ONE" (Mascaro 15). The ANANDA (bliss) is a state of trampling on the *maya* (illusion) by transcending the cycle of birth, death and metempsychosis.

Dance has a great symbolic value in creation. Everything comes into existence with movement, the essence of dancing. The dance of Shiva signifies the primeval dancing that harmonizes and balances the cosmic integrity. There are various dances of Shiva, but Coomaraswamy categorizes namely the three cosmic dances of Lord Shiva. The first is the dance in the Himalayas at the evening. The first is described in *Shiva Pradosha Stotra*. In this dance, the Lord places all three worlds in his throne. All the celestial gods like Sarsvati, Indra, Brahma, Laxmi, and Vishnu gather round Lord Shiva. They play different musical instruments to participate in the dance. The second popular cosmic dance of Shiva is *Tandava*. Coomaraswamy describes the significance of *Tandava*:

The second well known dance of Shiva is called the *Tandava*, and belongs to His *tamasic* aspect as Bhairava or Vira-bhadra. It is performed in cemeteries and burning grounds, where Shiva, usually in ten armed form dances wildly with Devi, accompanied by troops of capering imps. Representations of this dance are common amongst ancient sculptures, as at Elura, Elephanta, and also Bhuvaneshvara. The *tandava* dance is in origin that of a pre-Aryan divinity, halfgod, half-demon, who holds his midnight revels in the burning ground. (68)

This passage describes how the *Tandava* of Shiva takes place. The essence of *Tandava* is related to the divine creation. He is a form of formless. He becomes a half-man and a half-woman—*Ardha-narisvara*. This form is the fusion of every aspect and *Tandava* reflects this totality. Rohit Mehta explains that *Ardha-narisvara* is the optimum form of Shiva as consciousness. It manifests in its way. He exists nowhere, and thus arises from anywhere (309). In this way, Shiva's cosmic dance gives form to the formless reality. He is the fullness and the entirety of the void. This following is the posture of Shiva's *Tandava*:



Fig. 1. Lord Shiva's *Tandava*

Source: [www. google.com. nataraja+shiva](http://www.google.com.nataraja+shiva). Accessed 5 October 2021

The above picture of *Tandava* reflects the creation as the dance. The *Tandava* symbolizes the concepts of Vedic cosmology.

The third dance of Shiva is known as Nadanta dance. This dance of Nataraja takes place in front of gods at golden meeting hall in Chidambaram, the central part of the universe. Nowadays, Chidambaram lies in the southeastern Indian state of Tamil Nadu. The place is situated very close to the magnetic point of equator. Its angle is 1.750 N. Besides, the coordinates of this place is 8.73 minutes N 77.7 minutes E. And this is the reason Chidambaram is supposedly considered to be the geomagnetic center of the Earth, Universe, and Geo magnetic equator. And Lord Shiva's *Tandava* in this place bears a symbolic value. The dance at Chidambaram remains as the motif of the Nataraja Shiva that reflects all the dimensions of *Tandava* of Lord Shiva.

All these three categories of dances have their myths, yet their symbolic pattern is the same. The cosmic dance symbolizes the dynamism of the universe. The whole universe is a dance in its myriad forms and the Shiva as Nataraja exemplifies and personifies this in perfect form. Coomaraswamy beautifully summarizes the underlying pattern of cosmic dance:

In the night of Brahma, Nature is inert, and cannot dance till Shiva wills it: He rises from His rapture, and dancing sends through inert matter pulsing waves of awakening sound, and lo! matter also dances appearing as a glory round about Him. Dancing, He sustains its manifold phenomena. In the fullness of time, still dancing, he destroys all forms and names by fire and gives new rest. This is poetry; but none the less, science. (78)

This passage underlies the essentials of the cosmic dance. The three aspects of Shiva's cosmic dance bear the symbolic inference that the above passage describes. Generally, in

the day of Brahma (the lord of creation) creation manifests while in the night of Brahma, creation comes in a halt. Shiva dances in order to resume and awake the creation. It is the dance to give new vibration to the manifestations. Sri Krishna in *the Bhagavadgita* also justifies it as he says, “Those who know that the day of Brahma is of the duration of a thousand ages and the night (of Brahma) is a thousand ages long, they are the knowers of day and night. The day is the period of cosmic manifestation and night of non-manifestation. These are of equal length of time and alternate” (Radhakrishnan trans. 275). Shiva’s dance manifests the non-manifestation and vice versa. Either way, all rests in His dance. This is more than imagination which has its inference with science and fact.

The magnificent glory of Lord Shiva is related to the entire creation. The *Tandava* implies that he is timeless and eternal. The symbols of the moon, fire, and third eyes that are used in the hymns of *Tandava* powerfully reflect that Lord Shiva is both the representation of manifested and unmanifested realities. Both the day and night of Brahma merge in him. With his dance, he sustains the universe. He is the one where all the consciousness of the creation rests. Richard Smoley in his book *The Dice Game of Shiva* claims that Shiva represents the consciousness which is known as *Purusha*. He is the universal form of consciousness which is more universal and pervasive than the awareness that rules humans (ch. “The Game of Consciousness” par. 16). This hymn number six from *Shiva Tandava Stotram* epitomizes this reality of Lord Shiva’s resemblance with the cosmic consciousness:

दृषद्विचित्रतल्पयोर्भुजङ्गमौक्तिकस्रजोर्

गरिष्ठरत्नलोष्ठयोः सुहृद्विपक्षपक्षयोः ।

तृणारविन्दचक्षुषोः प्रजामहीमहेन्द्रयोः

समप्रवृत्तिकः कदा सदाशिवं भजाम्यहम् ॥१२॥

When will I understand and realize the great spiritual truth of ‘non-duality’ that would make me wise enough to grasp the essence (Tattva) of Lord Shiva as being the ‘universal, uniform and non-dual Truth’ of creation, as being the Lord who is the Supreme Being and the cosmic Consciousness that has been revealed in the form of this creation, that the Lord lives in each unit and entity of creation in a uniform manner irrespective of the physical form the individual units or entities take, and that there is nothing in creation that is not Shiva. In other words, whatever exists is a form of Shiva. Therefore, when will I be able to worship and offer my obeisance to this Supreme Lord of creation by seeing him everywhere, in each unit and entity of creation, equally and without discrimination? (Chhawchharia trans. 333)

The Lord bears eternity and infinity. Why is the symbolic implication possible? It is because Lord Shiva is the bliss and eternity. *Mandukya Upanishad* projects a state of the totality of the cosmic consciousness and the ultimate reality in a verse: “He is neither outward nor inward directed. He is not directed at all; and so he cognizes not.... He is unseen, ungraspable. He is without signs, without indications, unthinkable, and indescribable. His only proof is his presence: peaceful, benign, pure oneness” (Muller trans. 7). This Upanishad also uses the word “Shiva” who is a non-dual, pure, and benevolent. The above hymn garnishes that Shiva is the cosmic consciousness. This is the grand projection of Shiva in the *Tandava Stotram*.

Is this simply an imagination or a fact? Physicist Capra justifies that Shiva’s cosmic dance is “the most perfect personification of the dynamic universe. Through his dance, Shiva sustains the manifold phenomena in the world, unifying all things by immersing them in his rhythm and making them participate in the dance—a magnificent

image of the dynamic unity of the universe” (211). In this aspect, Shiva’s cosmic dance unifies all the diversities of the creation. It consolidates the ideation of the creation. It is more than simply an imagination. The beauty of the hymns is yet to come in the forthcoming analysis and interpretations.

Shiva Tandava Stotram: Revelation of Culture and Creation in Cosmic Dance

Shiva Tandava Stotram epitomizes the *Tandava* of Lord Shiva. The *Stotra* is loaded with many layers of significance and interpretations. The brilliancy of composition in a rhythmic pattern, the use of alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, and the figurative language signify that the verses are more than the human imagination can infer.

The hymns invigorate Lord Shiva’s cosmic dance. They mirror *panchakritya* (five activities) of creation namely, *shristhi* (“creation”), *sthiti* (“sustenance”), *samhara* (“destruction for evolution”), *tirobhava* (“inertness and eternal silence and stage of void”), and *anuraga* (“salvation from metempsychosis”). The first and second hymns spectacularly dramatize how and where Lord Shiva starts his cosmic dance and the creation dances with him:

जटाटवीगलज्जलप्रवाहपावितस्थले
गलेऽवलम्ब्यलम्बितांभुजङ्गतुङ्गमालिकाम्।
डमड्डमड्डमड्डमन्निनादवड्डमर्वयं
चकारचण्डताण्डवंतनोतुनःशिवःशिवम्॥१॥

The Lord (Shiva) who wears a crown of dense matted hairs on his head from which falls the holy river Ganges, washing and bathing the Lord’s throat around which a thick garland of serpents is dangling as its stream cascades down (to reach the plains of the land below), the Lord who dances ecstatically to the loud sound emerging from his Damaru (a hand-held tabor shaped like an hour-glass) that he shakes vigorously—let that divine Lord Shiva grant us our welfare and well-being. (Chhawchharia trans. 330)

This hymn invokes the gracious nature of Lord Shiva. The theatre where the Lord performs his dance is can be imagined in the deepest part of the psyche because this process of creation is beyond the grasp of the human mind. The matted hair of Lord Shiva, the river Ganges, Damaru, and snakes have great symbolic value. They are linked with the process of cosmic creation. The matted hair symbolizes that the lord is encompassing and pervasive. Since he is given the credit of cosmic consciousness, he is the vibe of every creature, a source of cosmic integration. De Coster interprets that the matted hair refers that the lord is omnipresent. He is “the subtle form of breath present in all living beings... Lord of All Beings” (29). So, Lord Shiva dances to give birth to *shristhi*.

The reference to the river Ganges is also powerful. From the matted hair, the Ganges flows. The water is the cosmic water, a source of energy, fertility from where the creation starts. It must be closely linked with the cosmic soup of plasma that the big bang theorists have guessed because “about 15 billion years ago, all substance in the universe was assembled in a relatively small area” (Gaarder 507). It was a liquid like substance from which later became the source of creation when it exploded. The cosmic water from cosmic consciousness! It is the connection of matted hair and the river Ganges.

Damaru is a drum-like musical instrument. When Lord Shiva plays it, then creation evolves out. Modern science and the theories like Big Bang also believe about the “primeval atom” (Doren 334) and the primordial sound. When that atom burst, then the sound made the creation happen. In this regard, the Drum epitomizes cosmic sound. Capra clarifies, “The upper right hand of the god holds a drum to symbolize the primal

sound of creation” (270). It might have been the sound of bang that the theorists like Abbe Georges Lemaitre and George Gamow of Big Bang have speculated in the primary creation of the universe. The whole universe has unity in a single atom. No doubt, the unity is better symbolized by Lord Shiva, and the primordial sound that makes the entire creation dance in a rhythm:

जयत्वदभ्रविभ्रमभ्रमद्भुजङ्गमश्चसद्
विनिर्गमत्क्रमस्फुरत्करालभालहव्यवाट्।
धिमिद्धिमिद्धिमिध्वनन्मृदङ्गतुङ्गमङ्गल
ध्वनिक्रमप्रवर्तितप्रचण्डताण्डवःशिवः॥११॥

Glory to Lord Shiva on whose forehead the fierce fire that burns there eternally is being whipped and fanned by the hot breath that emanates with a fierce hissing sound from the swaying hood of the mighty serpent that slithers swiftly from side to side on the head of the Lord, and who is dancing the fierce ‘Taandav Dance’ (of death and destruction) at a slow pace, with gravity, somberness and intense seriousness of demeanours, to the beat of the ‘Mridang’ (a timbrel; a kind of tambourine). (Chhawchharia trans. 332-333)

The power of sound and its relation with the cosmic creation is also better projected in the above cited verse. When the Lord dances the *Tandava*, it is to destroy not the creative forces, but the destructive forces. In this dance, the negativity is destroyed so that the life force opens the way for creation. The image of fire and the hissing sound from the snakes is really beyond the normal range of imagination. Do not these two images carry the readers’ imagination beyond the level of the normal range? Of course, they do. The fire is the power of annihilation of the dark forces at the dawning of creation. Besides, the serpent in its three coiled form represents the time phases of past, present and future. In him, everything assimilates. In the dance of Lord Shiva, all dimensions of time come to a single point. The “Mridanga” with its beat produces “dhimiddhimiddhimid,” then the creation starts at its pace. Storr better exemplifies in his book *Shiva, the wild God of Power and Ecstasy*, “When he starts the drumbeat, the Oneness of Shankar’s silence is shattered. The countless trillions upon zillions of rhythms and pulses of Creation start their beat, for all of Nature is dance...” (ch. “Shiva’s Dance” par. 1). If creation starts with the bang or that big explosion of that single atom, the projection of sound in the above verse represents the rhythmic oscillation of the entire creation.

Damaru and *Mridanga* with their two sides represent the manifest and unmanifest sides of existence. The musical play of these instruments energizes *Nada* sound, and it is “the cosmic sound of AUM, which can be heard during deep meditation. According to Hindu scriptures, Nada is the source of creation. This is one of the attributes of Shiva in his famous dancing representation” (De Coster 31). In the *Tandava Dance* of Shiva, fire, the river Ganges, matted hair, snake, crescent moon all are united in a point to reveal that the whole creation is harmonious and rhythmic processes. In the unity of all particles in a subatomic level, the creation bubbles. The following hymn also valorizes the cosmic creation in its integrated form:

जटाकटाहसम्भ्रमभ्रमन्लिल्पनिर्झरी
विलोलवीचिवल्लरीविराजमानमूर्धनि
धगद्गद्गद्गज्जललललाटपट्टपावके
किशोरचन्द्रशेखरेरतिःप्रतिक्षणमम॥२॥

The Lord (Shiva) whose head is adorned by the thick mat of coiled hairs that form a virtual cauldron in which the bubbling and frothing currents of river Ganges swirl vigorously, the Lord on whose forehead the fire is raging and leaping forth with a roaring sound, the Lord on whose head the newly formed

moon (crescent moon) looks admirable—let me have infinite affection and devotion every moment of my life towards such a divine form of Lord Shiva. (Chhawchharia trans. 330)

The coiled hair of the Lord with the river Ganges again recurs in the above hymn as a motif of creation. The fire merges with water, and the creation evolves! It sounds strange, but the cosmic creative process is beyond the pair of opposites. All phenomenal manifestations and the antagonisms merge at that point and become one. Beyond the mask of phenomenal play, all polarities vanish and become one. So, the great scientist Erwin Schrodinger rightly says, “All happenings are played out in one universal consciousness and there is no multiplicity of selves” (qtd. in Goldberg 285). And the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva symbolizes this point of singularity where all antagonisms merge and become one.

The crescent moon in the above verse signifies that the Lord is timeless and infinite. The verse projects the situation that transcends time. The above hymn speculates that among the multiple phases of cosmic creation, one phase might have been the phase of timelessness. There was a time when the time did not exist. Stephen Hawking states, “You can’t get to a time before the Big Bang because there was no time before the Big Bang” (37). If great physicists like Hawking guess about the state of timelessness before the creation, it is justifiable that the crescent moon and its symbolic pattern of timelessness holds value. In this sense, the hymns project *Tandava* as the dance of eternity and infinity.

The significance of *Tandava* is represented in the sculptor that shows the cosmic dance. The Nataraja Shiva dancing *Tandava* has remained a great metaphor for our time. It symbolizes the manifolds of creation and destruction and recreation. That’s why, “A large sculpture of Nataraja stands outside the European Center for Research in Particle Physics (CERN) in Geneva, Switzerland, underlining the cosmic forces and subatomic matter. In this context, Nataraja is also a political symbol for India's contribution to the sciences” (De Coster 25). We can find exact traces of thoughts in Philip Goldberg’s book *American Veda*, chapter sixteen, “The Dance of Shiva.” Likewise, the great explanation about Nataraja Shiva and Modern Physics finds its perfect blending in Capra’s book *The Tao of Physics*, the chapter entitled “The Cosmic Dance.” This is the value of Nataraja Shiva. What a powerful significance! Following sculptor of Nataraja Shiva at European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) represents his cosmic dance:



Fig. 2. Sculptor of Nataraja Shiva at CERN

Source: www.google.com.Shiva+Nataraja at CERN, Accessed 5 October 2021

It is the projection that Nataraja Shiva exhibits the motions of subatomic particles in the dancing form. It determines the whole creation. All these dynamics of creation find their perfect commingling in robust, musical, and rhythmic *Shiva Tandava Stotram*.

The projection of Lord Shiva in the Hindu religious philosophy resembles the state of totality and infinity. A similar implication labels Lord Shiva as the source of cosmic consciousness in whom the whole creation rests:

ललाटचत्वरज्वलद्धनञ्जयस्फुलिङ्गभा
निपीतपञ्चसायकनमन्निलिम्पनायकम् |
सुधामयूखलेखयाविराजमानशेखरं
महाकपालिसम्पदेशिरोजटालमस्तुनः ॥६॥

The Lord (Shiva) had destroyed the God of passions and lust known as Kaamdeo with the flames leaping out of the ferocious fire raging brilliantly in the altar represented by his forehead (i.e. from the fire spewing out of the third eye located in the middle of his forehead above the root of the nose), the Lord to whom Indra (king of Gods) regularly pays his respects, and the crown of locked hairs on whose head is adorned by the ever-changing form of the magnificent moon—let that Lord known as ‘Maha-kapali’ (i.e. Lord Shiva with a broad and high forehead) be a source of my wealth and well-being. (Chhawchharia trans. 331)

Lord Shiva is called *Trilochan*, the Lord with the third eye. This has great symbolic value because his three eyes epitomize the phases of time that are past, present, and future. Besides, the third eye represents the wisdom that is needed for creation. The fire that burns from his third eye is the source of creation. The moon also stands for the timelessness of the Lord. De Coster says, “The moon is a measure of time, and thus the Crescent on Lord Shiva's head signifies his control over time. The Lord is the Eternal Reality and He is beyond time” (30). The enormous force vitalizes that the Lord is non-dual. All dualities vanish and merge in him. He is the transcendent reality form where the truth about the universe has its source.

Tripura, Bhava (the mortal world, thereby freeing the creature from its fear), the fire-sacrifice of Dakshaprajapati, the elephant, the demon Andhakaasur, and Yamraj (the God of Death) himself—verily, I worship and adore this Lord (Shiva). (Chhawchharia trans. 332)

The Lord is omnipotent and omnipresence. The glorification of the Lord is so enigmatic that he does not only create, but sustains and manifolds the creation with his multifarious dynamism. Every evil, pain, tribulation and sorrow eliminate with the grace of Lord Shiva. The *Tandava* form of the lord at last changes in the fifth activity of Lord Shiva that is *anuraga*. Why does Lord Shiva vanquish Kaamadeo, the demon, and even Yama, the God of Death? He vanquishes them because ignorance, veil of *maya* (“illusion”), and fear have “to be conquered before liberation can be attained” (Capra 271). Besides, the Lord dances on the body of the demon which shows that he is the destroyer of fear and evil that lurk in the human psyche.

The power of salvation is the aspect of *anuraga* of Lord Shiva. Pattanaik in his book *Shiva to Shankara* opines that “Shiva is no longer indifferent to the woes of the world. His eyes are open. He sees, he listens, he reacts. His radiance nourishes samsara. Devotees acknowledge him as Shankara, the source of joy; as Shambhu, the abode of joy; and as Ashutosh, the one who is easy to please.” (ch. “Grace of Shiva” par. 1). The second last hymn of *Tandava Stotra* is full of the vigour of *anuraga*:

कदानिलिम्पनिर्झरीनिकुञ्जकोटेवसन्
विमुक्तदुर्मतिःसदाशिरस्थमञ्जलिवहन्।
विमुक्तलोललोचनोललामभाललग्नकः
शिवतिमन्त्रमुच्चरन्कदासुखीभवाम्यहम्॥१३॥

When will I be overwhelmed with ecstasy and spiritual bliss as I remain focused on the most charming form of Lord Chandrashekhar who has a broad forehead on which the crescent moon looks admirable, after I have abandoned all my evil thoughts and demeanours while I live in a secluded forested area on the banks of the holy river Ganges, with hands held together above my head in a posture of prayer and submission, as well as with my eyes full of tears of affection for the Lord and having an intense eagerness to have a divine vision of the adorable Lord as I faithfully and constantly repeat his holy Mantra ‘Shiva-Shiva’?
(Chhawchharia trans. 333)

The hymn is full of grace. It reveals the combined form of Shiva, Shankara, Shambhu and Ashutosh. His radiance nourishes the creation. He eliminates darkness, fear, and ill omen. The bliss and ponderous glory rest on him. The above hymn in its full devotional form invokes the grace and mercy of Lord Shiva. With the moon on his head, he holds the infinity. The snake symbolizes the ego, but when it is controlled it becomes the garland. The Ganges and the fire and third eye magnify the cosmic dance of the Lord. In him, all dynamism merges. All antagonism and dualism find their solace in the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva. So, Capra’s great remark, “The dance of Shiva is the dancing universe; the ceaseless flow of energy going through an infinite variety of patterns that melt into one another” (271) proves justifiable. In Lord Shiva, the universe rests. He folds and unfolds the creation. In his cosmic dance, all dualities merge, dance and become one.

Conclusion

Shiva Tandava Stotram magnifies the *Tandava* of Shiva that signifies cosmic creation. Shiva, in his blissful and ecstatic stage, dances to create, destroy, and recreate again. He is the Nataraja, the cosmic dancer, with whom the whole creation dances. The universe is his dancing stage and he alone is the spectator. He is the one in whom all the

dualities, antagonisms, polarities of this phenomenal world merge and become one. Shiva is the auspicious, graceful, and benevolent one. When *Shiva Tandava Stotram* describes the form of dancing Shiva, it uses multiple metaphors. The River Ganges symbolizes cosmic water. The moon stands for the perennial dimension of Lord Shiva. Snake and its coils embrace the past, present, and future in them. Every pattern and movement of frenzy in the cosmic dance represents the churning of the particles in the cosmos to renew them. Besides, the sound of “damaru and “Mridanga” represent the primal sound that resembles the big bang of the primordial atom. The cosmic dance, in this sense, projects the concept of singularity that the modern physics speculates regarding the unitary aspects of particles at the subatomic level. *Shiva Tandava Stotram* exploits multiple layers of metaphors and symbols to exhibit the divine dynamism of creation that drive the Hindu philosophical and cultural thoughts. The hymn number eleven resembles the incident projected by the Big Bang theory. It projects that the particles burst and whirled with force in the cosmos to create galaxies, and planets. *Shiva Tandava Stotram* exposes the exact incident rhythmically. The hymns epitomize the cosmic dance of Shiva to equate with the dynamism of the universe. The dance symbolizes that the creation is dance. Coomaraswamy theorizes the cosmic dance of Lord Shiva in five aspects namely, *shristhi* (“creation”), *stithi* (“sustenance and support”), *samhara* (“destruction to create”), *tirobhava* (“veiling and unveiling”), and *anuraga* (“grace and salvation”). In these five-fold aspects, the entire dynamics of cosmic creation. In this way, the dance of Shiva has become the symbol of the totality of endless cycles of creation, destruction, recreation, birth and death. It reflects the primal beats of creationism developed in the Hindu culture. Shiva as the cosmic dancer has been embraced by the modern secular world. So there is the two-meter high idol of Nataraja Shiva outside the plaza of the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva. This installation is not just a mere random one. It has a great metaphorical value because the *Tandava* of Shiva symbolizes the life force, existence, sustenance and rejuvenation of the creation. The motions and postures of *Tandava* resemble the motion of subatomic particles that provide the primal beat to the dance of creation. The emblem of Nataraja blazes the perfect divulgence of the Vedic cosmogony and Hindu culture. The cosmic dance of Shiva thus goes on inciting further research in the days to come.

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